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ABSTRACT

The major objective of the Independent Adoption Society's two year Community Recruitment Project was to provide permanent family care for non-Caucasian children and for children with mental handicaps. The project sought to identify and develop community resources to work together to assist the children and to encourage people who would consider becoming adoptive or foster parents through a public education program. The project succeeded in finding effective methods for recruiting volunteers and publicizing its goals. Fifty-two families who were interested in adopting black and mentally handicapped children contacted the agency, and others from the community volunteered to assist the project. Communication between the agency and the community improved because of a heightened sensitivity on the part of the agency toward the special needs of culturally different peoples. New goals for improving agency effectiveness were defined. Relevant documents from the project are appended. (MK)

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INDEPENDENT ADOPTION SOCIETY
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COMMUNITY RECRUITMENT PROJECT

FINDING BLACK FAMILIES

Written By
Mary James and I.A.S. Staff

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1. BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT.

A) The Children. In their survey "Children Who Wait" Jane Rowe and Lydia Lambert had estimated that in national terms there were 7,000 pre-school or primary school age children in need of permanent substitute family care. There was no question that these children had very special needs; a third exhibited behaviour problems and a half had additional handicaps either in health or development; two thirds of these children were of school age, two thirds were boys and a quarter were black, usually partially or completely West Indian. The findings of "The Children Who Wait" survey were confirmed in practice. In May 1976 the Adoption Resource Exchange had circulated a list of children needing families which was as follows:-

Older Children; a total of 47 aged between seven and sixteen years; of this number 35 were black or mixed race and 5 were girls.

Sibling Groups: a total of 26 groups of which 7 groups were Caucasian.

Mongol Children; a total of 15, 12 of whom were under six.

30 children described as handicapped and/or slow developing, aged between thirteen years and eighteen months, 15 of whom were Caucasian. Most of the children in this category had multiple handicaps.

B) Finding Families. Working towards the placement of such children presents a considerable challenge to home finding agencies and had been recognised by I.A.S. in 1973 when a policy decision was made to extend the services of the Society and to focus increasingly upon the placement of children with special needs. The Society sought to reach out to a wide range of people and to build into its adoption selection process special features which would enable families to obtain a realistic understanding of the needs of children and the ways in which they could help. It seemed, however, that despite an open door approach most of the people who offered their services were primarily interested in young children who did not present too severe difficulties in terms of behaviour or physical or mental handicap and who like themselves were Caucasian in racial origin. Traditional methods of recruitment of foster parents and adopters had not been very successful in breaking out of this circle and even new recruitment methods such as featuring children on T.V. or more sophisticated advertising campaigns while having some success did not seem to be producing a wide response from people in terms of the children most in need.

The questions which remained unanswered were whether there were people who because of their life experience, their family background, their special interest, were able to care for the children most in need of substitute families and if they did exist what kind of people were they, where were they, how could they be located and how best could foster care and adoption agencies approach them and bring to their attention the needs of children and enlist their help and involvement in providing families?

2. PROJECT OBJECTIVES.

A) Children of Differing Racial Background. I.A.S. has been finding homes for children from differing racial backgrounds for over fifteen years but is increasingly aware and regretful that very few black children are placed with black families. While the advantages to a child of growing up in a family that is culturally and ethnically similar to its own are many, primarily they enable the child to achieve more naturally a sense of racial identity and pride. In 1975 I.A.S. was involved in the planning of the Soul Kids Campaign and Project, and the follow-up of families who responded to the advertisements and publicity. One interesting development which emerged during the Soul Kids Project was an outreach into the black community and the beginning of some communication between family and child care agencies, West Indian Community Leaders and individuals focussing on black children in care. Time and resources did not permit the development of this approach. It was the further development of this communication and dialogue directed towards not only a better understanding of the needs of black children and their care, by both professionals and the general public, but also to exploring ways of working together to find families for such children, which was one object of the project.

B) Children with Mental Handicaps. The other group of children whose needs are desperate but for whom successful family placement has been minimal are those with mental handicaps. Experience in the United States has shown that such children can be found substitute families but that in many instances it is people with direct experience of handicap, perhaps with handicapped children of their own or with handicapped persons within their extended family, who are most likely to be in a position to care for such children. The opportunity to open up discussion and the exchange of ideas between people already involved in the care of mentally handicapped children and agencies seeking to find families for similar children again needs to be explored further. This was another aim of the Project.

The foremost objective of the Project was to explore the possibility of providing permanent family care for these two groups of children.

3. METHODS.

A) The Project sought to use a community work approach to establish a relationship between I.A.S. and people already involved with the children it sought to help. The community worker's aim would be to identify, mobilise, plan and develop any potential resources which already existed in the community; to be an agent to improve the channels of communication between individuals and organisations involved in the care of children by providing facts, figures, opportunities for discussion, joint studies and activities, and to obtain a degree of potential agreement and commitment towards the provision of family care for children.

B) The Project worker planned to seek out and develop networks of people who were giving their support to hospitals for mentally handicapped, special schools, Community Homes etc; people who generally might be regarded as good sources for potential substitute parents and those already personally involved in their own families with the care of children similar to those identified with the project.

C) The education of the wider public was also a part of the project. Encouragement to those who felt able to or who, with help, could begin to consider becoming adoptive or foster parents would be another important feature. The aim being to achieve this through group discussions, the media, the searching out of non-related groups, professional bodies and pastoral organisations and anyone involved in social care in its broadest sense.

D) Co-operation with care agencies such as local authorities, voluntary societies and hospitals was seen as an important facet of the project.

E) As far as children of differing racial backgrounds were concerned it was expected that the geographical starting point would need to be in those urban areas where mixed racial populations are concentrated. For handicapped children much was likely to depend upon local interest and resources as identified during the course of the project: to identify and concentrate in an area of greatest promise, with the plan being to operate in an urban and rural setting if at all possible, since this contrast would be useful in terms of both method and comparison. The starting points for the project were in the areas already served by I.A.S., ie. London and the Home Counties.

F) The plan was to record what happened and monitor developments at six monthly intervals. A final report evaluating the effectiveness and value of the project would be produced. It was hoped that working models might emerge which could be of assistance to other agencies.

4. COSTS.

The estimated cost of the project based upon the salary of a full time social worker plus the necessary administrative supports, travelling expenses etc. was £6,039 per annum for a period of two years.

The project was funded by a grant from the Department of Health and Social Security.

5. THE FIRST PHASE - (OCTOBER 1976 TO JULY 1977.)

During the first phase of the project a full time community worker was employed. The worker had previously been involved as a student volunteer with Soul Kids so was familiar to some extent with the aims concerning the recruitment of black families. He needed time however to become familiar with the mental health side of the project, with the workers of I.A.S. and with adoption in general. The first months of the work were taken up mainly making contact with a wide range of individuals and organisations who seemed most likely to be sympathetic, interested and prepared to help. This initial groundwork involved much letter writing, many phone calls, personal contacts and preparation of information which could be disseminated on a broader basis. - The first 'Need your Lovin' Leaflet was produced. (See Appendix e). Contact was made with a number of community and consumer groups, with educational establishments and with social work agencies both in the voluntary and statutory sector. A number of special activities were arranged and the project worker and agency staff also took part in community activities such as fetes and galas. (Appendices a and b give more details of these contacts and activities.)

It became clear during the first months that in order to achieve the active support and involvement of people who did express some general interest, persistent hard work would have to be undertaken. This raised questions about the kind of worker employed to undertake this task. Certainly it seemed that it had to be someone who was credible to the people who were approached, someone with an understanding of adoption, the needs of children, the general climate of children's services, and someone with the stamina and commitment to keep and activate people's interests and enthusiasm. When working with the black community it seemed there would be much to be gained if the worker already had genuine links or membership in the community. Such a worker would have a better understanding of possible sources of help and a greater ability to communicate in a real way with people of different ethnic origins and cultures.

The introduction of a community worker into a case work agency was also not without difficulties. The community worker felt that there should have been more active support for him and the project by the other workers while they felt their support was available and looked for initiation of discussion to the community worker. It was clear that this area of possible conflict would need to be carefully considered and it would be important that there should be a good link between the agency's other workers and the project worker. This evaluation of the first months resulted in the project being divided into two more or less separate halves with part-time workers employed for each.

6. SECOND PHASE - (AUTUMN 1977 TO DECEMBER 1978).

A. Staffing. A letter describing the aims of the project led to an invitation to meet The Association of Jamaicans and it was from this contact that Hyacinth Moodie expressed her interest and offered to help, initially on a voluntary basis working alongside the original project worker. Mrs. Moodie is a Jamaican, she has lived in England for twenty four years and worked as a midwife. She is someone who sees her roots in Jamaica, thinks of herself very much as a West Indian, but is very familiar and comfortable in British society, and actively involved in helping the West Indian community in London. Members of The Association of Jamaicans and involvement in a Police Liaison Scheme were just two of her numerous concerns. Mrs. Moodie seemed well suited to provide access to the Caribbean community at all levels; she was familiar with and understood well the network of communications, both formal and informal, which exist within the community and was prepared to act as a link between I.A.S. social workers and possible adoptive and foster parents. Not a qualified social worker and with comparatively little experience of adoption and fostering, opportunities needed to be provided so that she could broaden her knowledge and experience in this sphere. Association of British Adoption and Fostering Agencies and Adoption Resource Exchange Conferences and meetings, participation in and observation of some of the Society's work helped with this. Mrs. Moodie was eventually employed as a community liaison worker for the project on a part-time basis, working twelve hours per week and remained until the project as such ended.

B. Community Education and Recruitment.

This was an important aspect of the project to which much time and effort was expended.

At a national level there were contacts, meetings, discussions and exchanges of views with such organisations as the Commission for Racial Equality, the Caribbean Commissions, the Commonwealth Institute and the Commonwealth Children's Society.

At a local level Mrs. Moodie was in touch with a wide range of organisations, schools, clinics, legal centres, neighbourhood centres, advice centres, churches, police liaison schemes, Credit Unions and London Transport. Informal personal contacts were also made; Mrs. Moodie spent time in places where people carry out ordinary everyday activities and large quantities of leaflets were distributed and people talked to in street markets, pubs, hairdressers, shops and offices. A number of display boards were specially prepared and strategically placed in local advice centres, libraries, Caribbean hairdressers and bakeries.

I.A.S. participated in a number of community activities such as garden fetes, galas, Jubilee Shows and minority group festivals in places like Brixton, Peckham and Haringey. Sometimes the project rode on the back of a larger organisation, sometimes a separate and independent stall was mounted, sometimes our activities were a joint venture as at the Peckham Gala where we combined with the Local Authority Fostering Unit. At these galas and fetes leaflets were distributed, displays mounted and activities organised to appeal to children and families, providing the opportunity to talk to people informally as they were having fun.

C. Use of Media.

i) Radio. B.B.C. local radio transmit a regular programme called Black Londoners. The programme is compiled and introduced by Alex Pascall who has a general concern about the black community in the United Kingdom and was prepared to give some air time so that the needs of children in care could be explored and the question of adoption and fostering raised. A series of three programmes took place in the autumn of 1977; they involved I.A.S. staff, Kay Donley from Spaulding U.S.A., and a number of adoptive parents, an adult adoptee and a black foster mother. One of the programmes was a phone-in. These three programmes produced ten enquiries from potential foster and adoptive parents. A further Radio London programme was planned for the end of 1978 and in fact took place in January 1979. Again there were a number of people contributing to the programme and a phone-in and again this produced some enquiries. Plans are under way for additional use to be made of air time on Radio London during 1979 since this seems to be an effective way of raising issues, sharing information, obtaining views and recruiting.

ii) The Press. Throughout the project there have been quite a number of contacts with the press, particularly West Indian World. Various activities, the Jubilee Show and ethnic minority festivals have been reported. Time spent talking to reporters from the paper with the aim of producing an article on fostering and adoption was not successful. There appeared to be considerable disorganisation at 'West Indian World' which means that their reports did not always produce the correct facts or scheduled articles. During the time on the project a number of advertisements for specific children on referral to I.A.S. were placed in West Indian Word as was a staff advertisement. The response to the specific children advertisement however was poor, and although the children concerned have been placed they have not been able to join black families. This poor response was probably because we were not able to place advertisements on a regular basis or to use pictures of children; also our plans for the advertisements to be accompanied by an article were not realised.

D. The Response from Ethnic Minority Families.

During the seventeen months from July 1977 to December 1978 fifty one enquiries about the possibility of adoption and fostering were received by I.A.S. The vast majority of these enquiries came to the Society as a direct result of the project initiative; without the project I.A.S. would likely have been in touch with less than one fifth of this number of potential black families. The people who did respond to project activities seemed to include a number who would not normally have approached an adoption agency or even a local authority fostering service. Some of the response was probably emotional but nonetheless genuine and generous. Some of the people who offered help were not able to be realistically considered for the kind of children known to be needing families. There were a number of quite elderly women often with failing health and sometimes with severe health problems; they appeared to be looking for companionship in what could be an approaching old age cut off from wider contact with their families and denied the useful role fulfilled by elderly relatives in West Indian community and family life back home. A number of enquiries were received from single women, some of whom had children, others without. Again 'back home' such women would likely have been involved in the upbringing of a child of their family while in Britain this expected opportunity to contribute to family life did not seem to exist. There was no policy to prevent the use of single parents as adopters but in fact no single parents, adopters or foster parents, were recruited during the project. The preference of prospective parents to offer a home to a young child only, their need to pursue full time employment and lack of accommodation were among issues which prevented the use of single black parents. (Appendix d gives a breakdown of the response from families and what happened.)

E. Dealing With Enquiries.

i) Initial Contact. It was agreed that everyone who made contact with the agency as a result of the project should be given the opportunity of a personal meeting, and that this meeting would be available in a way that was most convenient to the enquiring individual or family. This offer was available even to people who on paper or just from telephone conversations seemed to be patently unlikely to be able to help. Initial contacts were with Mrs. Moodie, they usually took the form of a home visit, were often in the evening and sometimes at weekends. Mrs. Moodie aimed to try and explain something of how adoption and fostering worked in the U.K., to give information about the kind of children for whom families were needed and generally act as a bridge to the agency and its adoption workers. On this initial contact many families seemed prepared to share considerable personal and financial information with Mrs. Moodie, seemingly in a more relaxed way than would have been expected had the first contact been with a white worker from the agency. They did however often express some fear of how the information would be used and needed reassurances about confidentiality and the safeguarding of their privacy. Following Mrs. Moodie's initial contact individual families were discussed at I.A.S. and allocated to individual adoption workers.

ii) The Application. The next step was usually a joint meeting when Mrs. Moodie personally introduced the social worker to the family. Having effected this introduction Mrs. Moodie sometimes withdrew from the application process, other times she would be involved in a number of interviews and further discussions. Joint interviews were not without difficulties both for the adoption workers and for Mrs. Moodie. These difficulties tended to highlight the kind of cultural misunderstandings and the very different expectations concerning the way that arrangements are made for substitute family care in British, Caribbean and African society. Mrs. Moodie did not always share the same emphasis on specific concerns as her English social work colleagues.

Quoted below are some of Mrs. Moodie's views concerning her involvement in the project, her work with families and with social workers. Also some views expressed by the social workers who worked with prospective adopters and foster families and the views of one family.

iii) Mrs. Moodie writes:- As I continue the campaign to find black prospective adopters for black and mixed race children I am convinced that there are various difficulties to overcome.

The motives of prospective adopters were often seen by the white social workers as dubious and stress was placed on the psychological problems inherent in adoption. As I listened to the dissatisfactions divulged relating to the criteria of eligibility and suitability and the legal ramifications faced by the mothers' indecisiveness and the reclaim of the child, I can understand when some consider the effort a waste of time on their part.

Most black people are accustomed to a different system of adoption in their own country, and this is slowly changing to the British system. They are used to adoption through social and economic arrangements such as; one family had too many mouths to feed and the other less to feed but less hands to work in the home or on the farm, the family without a son and wants an heir, the infertile, the rich family who takes the poorer relative and will educate and provide a better environment, then there is the system where grandparents, uncle, auntie and cousins will play the part of foster parents for the less well off.

Prospective adopters need to understand the criteria of the system in this country in a simple down-to-earth approach. The fears of complications which they have heard and read would be broken down by openness, trust, and free discussions with adopters particularly from their own ethnic background.

Many social workers do not understand the black applicant, and I would suggest that for those social workers to achieve success they should work more closely to a black social worker or community worker who really knows the ethnic background of these clients thereby alleviating the fears, anxieties, the way words are used and expressed which portray similar meanings, at the same time respect and tolerance must be given on both sides. Practical support here and now is more relevant than the role that is played by some workers.

It must be taken into consideration that the majority of clients are not high school graduates and many of them need guidance even to fill the forms of application and yet with this limited level of education these same people can be excellent adoptive parents. I am sure the social worker can act as a friend andyet still be professional while trying to alleviate the self doubts, fears, guilts, resentments, hostilities which undermine good relationships which may develop. It must be foremost in our minds that we can undermine the image of the client by our attitudes when interviewing.

It is also interesting to note that most of the black applicants are between the ages of 40 - 50 age group, the reason for this is because these people lived in this country long enough and have worked very hard to buy and furnish a home where they can accommodate a child or children whereas the younger ones have not reached that stage. The other thing is that many of them do not know that they can adopt a child while living in a council flat or other rented accommodations, and this brings me to the point where I must express the need for more financial help in promoting a large scale campaign and the employment of other workers to make this project a more successful one.

Education through Radio and Television, literature, newspapers, home visits, meetings, and others have been carried out with success but more is needed. At the moment it is only one Community Worker engaged on the project and only twelve hours per week that has achieved the success mentioned from July 1977 to December 1978, therefore one realises that there is the need for greater participation in this field.

iv) The Social Workers' Views.

A.M. Writes: "I have found that West Indian and African families often seem to be unreliable and unpunctual about appointments and responses generally and this tends to tie up with another general tendency to disappear at crucial moments like just before the completion of an application or when a child has been offered.

Families from different cultures often seem to be rather regardless of the relevance of certain issues which I would see as highly relevant factors. Such things as how past experiences and relationships may affect present functioning and the importance that is attached to telling a child about his adoptive status, yet couples also have a remarkable degree of acceptance of another person's child and very little anxiety about his or her fitting in or being accepted. This can lead to a fairly relaxed atmosphere and settling in process particularly for young children, but also leaves the social worker worrying, perhaps needlessly, about how much families have taken in of the principle of a child knowing about his own family and how much allowance will be made about a child's previous experiences. I do not believe that either West Indians or Africans 'cheat' on this score although they do not share the same concerns as those of us brought up in English families and culture.

Expectations of black families considering adoption differ from ours on the basis of cultural practice and general experience. Communicating across these differing expectations can present real difficulties, understanding what is being said is not straightforward. Communication has to take into account what people know and what they feel and obviously there has to be much give and take between social workers and families in order to establish communication."

A.W. Writes: "Mrs. H. certainly saw her infertility as something shaming, a view shared by two other West Indian women who came only for preliminary interviews and found it very difficult to talk about this.

The length as well as the need for an application process is something that families I have worked with have found daunting and I think this may influence couples who drop out. Nevertheless once introductions to a child have started the families do not seem to be in a hurry to take the child home and in a number of cases have continued visiting far longer than we thought necessary.

The question of both parents working can be difficult to discuss either as a subject in itself or as to how they will handle the child in this situation. Families often seem very touchy about this seeming interference on our part and into their way of bringing up a child. Often they seem to feel that any such discussions even when focussed upon the child's needs are a reflection of their competence to handle a child. I have been told quite pointedly by a prospective adopter that she was used to dealing with children and a natural mother and an adoptive mother ganged up on me and told me they knew all about how to bring up 'their' meaning West Indian children and how 'they' reacted.

I find that families can be quite cagey about certain financial and personal information, in one application I never did find out how much the husband earned and I also found that with two adoptive fathers they disliked very much talking about their early life and were embarrassed at admitting to me their illegitimate status. I felt that this factor also influenced one family's withdrawal from an application process.

I found some families to have very little sympathy with mothers who give up a child especially if the mother is black. There seems to be a feeling amongst the men particularly that black girls don't give up their babies.

As far as actual communication is concerned I have not found this too much of a problem probably because I have had some previous experience of working with black families and am to some extent used to the idiom."

R.W. Writes: "Often it is difficult for a couple to appreciate and understand why the adoption process is so formal compared with the practice in their own culture. I sometimes find it particularly difficult to get the husband to see that he is a full partner in the enterprise and have found that the husband will often consider children as the woman's concern and not wish to be particularly involved. Consequently there can be resentment when it has been felt that I wished to discuss areas which are private. It is obviously often difficult for the men to talk about their feelings of childlessness or to talk about feelings or close personal relationships generally - particularly the marital relationship. I sometimes have difficulty in comprehending what can appear to be rather rigid attitudes towards such issues as sexual acting out in youngsters, questions of discipline and the high expectations that some families have of their children. There seems to be general lack of appreciation as to why I would want to know about a couple's childhood experience and young life and certainly one area where I have encountered possible feelings of resentment is in discussing financial matters. I find that resentment or embarrassment is often dealt with by giggling, particularly the women, while the men often communicate feelings very clearly in a non-verbal way, particularly if they do not share their wife's feelings about adoption to the same degree. Often with both husband and wife non-verbal messages are an important element in an interview. One is well aware how difficult and alien the formal interview situation is for many black couples and this is in itself a difficultywhich one has to seek to overcome in order to establish a reasonably comfortable atmosphere where applicants can feel free to express their thoughts and feelings and where the prospective adopters and the social workers can try to understand each other."

R.E.W. Writes: "It is my experience generally that applicants from ethnic minority groups do not come to an agency with the same rough idea about such an agency works or what a social worker will want to know about them as do English couples. On the whole as one would expect, most English applicants will have absorbed current attitudes and ideas towards adoption; it is likely they will expect the child's needs to be the true focus, they will expect to be asked personal questions and they will express their feelings and disappointments in ways that will be more familiar to the social worker."

L.H. Writes: "Although we can get irritated and exasperated by the failure of black couples to keep appointments and the very common tendency to return home for lengthy periods at what we consider crucial stages of placement, I feel we are not as rigid or uncomprehending as all that. We are learning all the time about differing racial attitudes, for instance the distinct differences between African and West Indian families; and we willingly accept attitudes and circumstances which, because of our improving knowledge, we know to be appropriate to the family concerned, but which we would find unacceptable in couples from our own cultural background.

I have found it helpful, as I expect has everyone, in establishing rapport with black couples, to be quite honest about just how much we need them and how valuable their offer is, right from the start. Hopefully this can minimise any antagonism caused by questioning about factual details.

I personally have not met any reluctance to talk about early life experiences and difficulties, but I feel that it is very hard to get across what we feel is the most important aspect of talking to a child about his adoption and origins. Perhaps this becomes easier if, obviously in uncontested placements, we actively promote our policy of meetings between substitute and natural parents, so that the arrangement can feel less formal and more 'family'."

v) A Family View - As Told to their Social Worker.

Our daughter picked up a leaflet about fostering and adoption at the Embassy, brought it home, and suggested we should adopt a child. We already knew there were children needing homes because we had seen an advert for two children in West Indian World, so we discussed it in the family and then phoned I.A.S. Hyacinth Moodie came to visit us which was helpful, we had a discussion and then filled in the application form.

The form was straightforward and we didn't mind the interviews and the questions we were asked. We accepted the process because we thought it was necessary and we didn't have anything to hide. We are easygoing people used to having visitors and the social workers were welcome along with everyone else. The only thing which upset us slightly was the cost of our medicals; £16 made a hole in our budget for that week and we feel that really these fees should be paid for adopters.

After we heard about T we went to see her at the Children's Home where she lived. The introductions went well and we really don't have any complaint at all except that there was rather a long delay between our first meeting with her and the time when she first came to our home. We feel that what we were told about her was absolutely true and that we were well prepared. We hadn't realised that there was quite so much contact with her natural family but that all worked out in the end.

Since T has been living with us the social workers have kept in touch and we know we can call on them. We do think the financial side leaves something to be desired. The boarding out allowance is not good and you do have to subsidize it; however, you don't take a child for the money but because you want to help. Also it was a long time before the council reimbursed us for the beds we bought and meanwhile we had to carry the cost.

We think it very sad that there are children like T living in Children's Homes without families of their own. We think more West Indian families would take children if they knew about the problem. Social workers should advertise in the black community and visit people in their homes to show them what the problem is. Having said that, you do have to like children to take an extra one into your home and a lot of people can't cope with their own kids, let alone take on more. We think you have to be strong-willed to take an older child. It is easier if the child is aged four or five, but a lot of families can't manage a child of that age as they have to go out to work. We couldn't have taken a younger child as we both work.

The fostering and adoption process here is different from how it is in the West Indies and more formal, but we don't really think this puts people off. We believe that if you want a child you accept the system.

vi) Some Practice and Training Implications. The views and feelings of Mrs. Moodie and the social workers are not particularly new or unexpected. They very much mirror similar views expressed by other workers in this field including those involved in the Soul Kids Project. They do nevertheless merit careful consideration by workers involved in trans-racial social work whether it be in substitute family care, or family and preventative work, and are also of interest to those people responsible for employing and training social workers. A training need has been identified by the Association of Directors of Social Services and the Commission for Racial Equality in their report "Multi-Racial Britain - The Social Services Response". This report emphasises the need for workers to know about the culture, social background, family and child rearing patterns of ethnic minority groups; for consideration to be given to the relevance of traditional social work intervention as a means of offering assistance to people of different cultures and for the examination of the attitudes and expectations of those providing help, ie. the social workers.

Since the I.A.S. Project was primarily concerned with people who originated in the Caribbean an awareness of a number of important events and experiences specific to this groupwas essential. There are important historical reasons for existing family patterns; the effect of slavery and colonisation, and more recently migration, are all part of the Caribbean experience and affect people's lives, attitudes, feelings and expectations today. To consider just briefly the actual experience of migration; the movement of people from country districts to towns and abroad to other countries has created a profound contrast in life style for many people who have come to the U.K. during the past twenty years. Life in the tropical Caribbean does not take place behind closed doors as is the case in colder Northern climes. Back home villages, towns and roads are alive with people carrying out their everyday business in the open and with others. Small island countries also have their own social order and unique characteristics - everyone is likely to know everyone else in some way, it is difficult to have personal secrets or to achieve the anonymity to be found in British society. This strong verbal tradition, whether it be in the discussion of politics or just gossip concerning friends, neighbours or national leaders, all contributes not only to a strong island but also to a strong personal sense of identity. All this contrasts greatly with the harsh climatic conditions, the size and the industrial nature of British society, the loss of personal identity and the enclosed nature of family life in Britain. Additional factors such as the unwelcoming attitude of some British communities, the hardships, social disadvantage and racial prejudice may also have faced West Indian families. Social workers must therefore consider carefully and try to understand all these varying experiences, otherwise it is likely to be difficult either to provide services for individuals or to work collaboratively with people who offer their services either in foster care, adoption or other community based activities such as daily minding. It is likely to be beneficial if workers from different ethnic groups are able to work side by side, and while it cannot be assumed that there will automatically be easy communication and understanding between colleagues it should at least be possible for differences to be explored, misunderstandings to be clarified and opportunities provided to learn from each other.

Among the families who did respond to the Project were a small but nevertheless significant number of childless African couples, usually middle class or professional, who, although living in England for some time with the intention of remaining on a permanent basis, still had very close contact with their families, villages and tribes back in Africa (often Nigeria). These couples all had a strong sense of African identity and were often struggling to combine the family and social structures of their homeland and childhood with those of Britain. One man spoke of "trying to bond together two different elements". The African couples seemed to cope well with the actual adoption process and provided helpful and detailed information and explanations about their own family backgrounds, cultural differences and present life situations. The British concept of adoption was however often very alien to them. They found difficulty in understanding that mothers give up their children to strangers and often the emphasis that we place on telling a child about its adoption or family of origin was hard for them to accept totally. They had come to an adoption agency to seek a solution to the problem of their childlessness and infertility, but for some couples this answer did not prove to be satisfactory. It seemed that for the men particularly, adopting someone else's child would not enable them to overcome their feelings of failure and lack of status at not being able to father a child. Consequently, much to the distress of the wives, at least three couples eventually withdrew from adoption either during the application process or in one case at the stage when a child had been offered; another couple is currently facing this dilemma. It may also be of some significance to note that of the three African couples who have adopted a child through I.A.S. in the past four years, none have returned to add to their family. Perhaps adoption for these couples was also primarily a matter of achieving the personal status of parenthood rather than creating a family, as adoption tends to be seen in British terms.

7. SIDE DEVELOPMENTS.

A) Bursary Tour of the Caribbean. Involvement first of all with the Soul Kids Project, and subsequently in the I.A.S. Community Recruitment Project, led me to apply to the Commission for Racial Equality for a Travelling Bursary, and I eventually spent six weeks in the West Indies at the end of 1978 visiting Trinidad, Dominica and Jamaica. While in the Caribbean I was able to meet with professionals involved in the provision of all kinds of social services and to get some brief impressions of life there. (A copy of my report of this tour is attached to this report - Appendix f). There seemed to be a slow but nevertheless real process of re-evaluation and change in family patterns and the roles of men and women taking place throughout the West Indies. It was interesting to compare the concept of and arrangements for adoption and fostering services in the three islands. In Trinidad there is no official fostering service although a large amount of private fostering is undertaken. Dominica, a small and newly independent island, has a fostering service, but often the government fostering service is a way of financially maintaining private arrangements. In Jamaica there is quite a sophisticated programme and it was particularly interesting to visit a former Soul Kids colleague who now works in the Jamaican Children's Department and who in the past two years has found homes for sixty children without specific advertisement or recruitment. I was able to meet some of these foster parents and was interested to discover that a percentage of them had previously lived in the U.K.; it would have been additionally interesting to know if their knowledge of fostering in Britain had in any way affected their preparedness to foster through a public agency in Jamaica. When asked if they had considered fostering while living in the U.K. most families explained that they saw their stay in Britain as temporary and consequently did not think it appropriate to become involved in fostering or adoption. This explanation provides one possible reason for failure to recruit Caribbean foster parents in the U.K. and merits some consideration in the planning of recruitment and the use of foster parents - perhaps more families would be prepared to offer short stay help. When meeting the Jamaican foster parents it was interesting to note details of family composition, age and health of foster parents. It seemed that most were in an older age group than one would have expected in Britain, particularly in terms of the age of the children placed in their care; most of the children placed were pre-school age, their placements were expected to be permanent and little family contact was envisaged. The foster parents visited in Jamaica were fairly middle class, often both of the foster parents worked but they had access to help in the house which is still a common feature of middle class Jamaican life. In the three islands visited there was some form of adoption but primarily it seemed a way of legalising already existing and privately made arrangements. Very few children were being placed through public agencies for adoption with strangers.

B) I.A.S./Lambeth Proposed Special Unit. The development of a New Black Families Unit has grown out of discussions with a wide range of people involved in adoption and fostering, the needs of children in care and race relations who initially met together to consider whether the lessons of the Soul Kids Campaign could be extended and whether some kind of black adoption and fostering service should be established on a more permanent basis. The eventual outcome of these discussions is that a working partnership between I.A.S. and Lambeth Social Services Department has been formed based upon Lambeth's obvious and recognisable need for families for black children, the I.A.S. involvement with Soul Kids and subsequent work on black family recruitment as undertaken in the Community Work Project. Staff of this new unit will be employed by Lambeth Social Services and seconded to I.A.S. The primary aim will be to recruit substitute families, both foster and adoptive, for black children in the care of Lambeth. The unit staff will consist of a Unit Leader, two Home Finders and secretarial support who will be supplemented by workers from I.A.S. and will work closely with a specifically selected Area Team in Lambeth. The unit is being financed partly through Inner City Partnership Funding. There will be a research element in the unit; discussions with the National Children's Bureau, the Lambeth Social Services Research Department and Goldsmiths College are underway to decide how best the research should be funded and executed. The aim is for this new unit to become operational in Autumn 1979.

8. CONCLUDING SUMMARY.

A) Recruitment and Publicity. During the two years of the project, adoption, fostering and the needs of children in care have all been brought to the attention of a wide range of individuals and organisations. Various ways and means of communication and community contact have been attempted and these events have enabled some conclusions to be drawn. Certainly formal letters to organisations do not seem to be an effective way of making contact or getting the message across. From one mailing of thirty five organisations only four responded. More personal & informal contacts such as talking to people in the street, at their places of work, involvement in community activities, all appear to be more successful, perhaps confirming the fact that by and large the West Indian community is a very verbal one and that discussion and gossip are established ways of communication not only back in the Caribbean but also here in the U.K. The use of the media had a mixed response. Certainly the Radio London Phone-In seemed to be a good way of communication; people phoned in with comments and views and also offers of help. The use of the black press was less successful, perhaps because we were not able to campaign and advertise in the press on a large scale as had been the case with Soul Kids, but somehow also we failed to establish good enough rapport with the reporters and consequently despite collaboration with them, individual articles never materialised. Maybe we needed the help of professionals used to dealing with the media.

I think it is important to emphasise that the public relations and response to general publicity did not really 'take off' until Mrs. Moodie became involved in the Project. It seems that her personal involvement in a number of West Indian concerns and her standing and acceptance in the West Indian community were extremely beneficial to the Project and gave it the access which helped to produce a response. It certainly seems to be important that anyone employed to act as an outreach or community worker should be acceptable to and have credibility in the black community. It would seem to follow that this task can best be undertaken by someone who is naturally a member of the community. In this project this worker was not a qualified social worker - which may even have been an advantage but meant that it was necessary for careful links to be forged between the social workers and the 'home finder'. This is something perhaps to be explored further.

B) The Families - Some Common Features. Fifty two prospective families and interested people made personal contact with the agency during the period of the Project. Five families have been accepted as adoptive parents and three children have been placed with new families. In addition one residential social worker was recruited and one 'social aunt'. Eleven applications are still in process and a small but steady flow of enquiries about fostering and adoption still continue. Quite a large percentage of the families who contacted the project were childless. Compared with native born white childless couples they were sometimes in an older age range, but like their white counterparts, they were mostly hoping to be able to adopt a baby or a young child like themselves, often with a strong preference for a girl. As would be expected, because of their different patterns of family life Caribbean couples seemingly had more complex family structures than the average British family and certainly a large number of the prospective adopters than would probably have been expected presented some kind of health problem. Hypertension seemed to be a rather common health feature amongst the women. While African couples seemed able to take the application process in their stride, unresolved feelings about infertility sometimes presented the husbands with real difficulties in accepting someone else's child. Caribbean couples on the other hand seemed to find the actual application process more difficult and while they were concerned about parents giving up their children they usually could accept another person's child as their own more easily.

C) Communication and Understanding Each Other. The whole question of communication is very important. The comments made by Mrs. Moodie and the social workers indicate how cultural misunderstandings easily occur. Recurring comments about the use of language, the need to understand different cultural and family patterns and the differing emphasis that Mrs. Moodie and the families sometimes placed upon various aspects of the adoption application all highlight the need for workers involved in inter-racial social work to be well prepared, well informed, sensitive to and aware of national and cultural differences. I.A.S. workers certainly learned a great deal during the project from Mrs. Moodie, from West Indian colleagues and friends, but most of all from the families themselves.

D) The Agency. Having said that agency staff need to have an ability to respond in a flexible way to ensure that potentially valuable resources are not lost, it is also important to stress that inter-cultural social work has implications for the social work agencies themselves. Staffing, staff training, established criteria, accepted methods used to evaluate prospective adopters, agency procedures, how information is gathered, the use of forms, may all need to be reviewed and redefined. The aim will be to find the best possible family for each child in need, but different family patterns, life styles, child rearing patterns and expectations, emphasis, anxieties and fears all have to be taken into account. Social workers and families are engaged in a joint exercise which explores the child's needs and the family's potential. This can be a difficult task when people of common experience, expectations and similar cultures work together - how much more so when it is attempted by people without all this in common and often with many cultural differences and misunder-standings into the bargain.

* *

June 1979.

Appendix A.

COMMUNITY GROUP CONTACTS

1. Voluntary Organisations and Self-Help Groups.

Harmony
St. Anthony's Church - Black Parent Groups
Greenleaf Baptist Church
Reformed Pentecostal Church - North London
Pentecostal Church - Brixton
Family Service Unit - South East London
Peckham Settlement
West Indian League
West Indian Parents Action Group
Association of Jamaicans
Brixton Neighbourhood Centre
Cambridge House and Talbot Settlement
Walklin Centre - Haringey

2. Schools and Colleges.

Thomas Carlton School
Polytechnic of North London
Goldsmiths College
Kingsway College

3. Galas and Festivals.

Peckham Rye Gala 1977 and 1978
Lambeth Country Show 1978
Haringey Show 1977 and 1978

4. Statutory Agencies.

Southwark Social Services Department - Headquarters and Area Teams,
Residential Centres

St. Barnaby's Health Centre
Nunhead Clinic
Commission for Racial Equality

Community Relations Camberwell
Community Relations Brixton
Community Relations Waltham Forest
Community Relations Haringey

Lambeth Social Services Department
Abbey Centre

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Appendix B.

DISTRIBUTION OF LITERATURE.

Jamaican High Commission
Trinidad and Tobago High Commission
Jamaica Tourist Board
Air Jamaica
Commonwealth Institute
Community Relations Councils
Citizens Advice Bureaux
Heathrow Airport
Law Centres
Public Houses
Churches
Markets
Stores - Caribbean Groceries
Caribbean Bakeries
Hairdressers
Barbers
Cash and Carry
Travel Agents
London Transport
Credit Unions
House to House and Street Leafleting

All the above were initially personal handouts often followed up by leaving material on display and leaflets for collection.

DISPLAYS.

Caribbean Bakery - East Dulwich
Information Centre - East Dulwich
Brixton Neighbourhood Centre
Forest Hill Clinic
Walworth Road Library

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Appendix C (i).

POSTAL CIRCULATION AND LETTER.

Caribbean Overseas Association
Commonwealth Council (for the Welfare of Citizens)
Association for the Protection of Children in Islington
Archway Women's Liberation Group
Citizens' Advice Bureau - Finsbury
Hanley - Crouch Community Group
Mr. S.O. Franklin, London, N.5.
Afro-Caribbean Association
Antigua National Association
North London West Indian Association
West Indian Standing Conference
Antigua Health and Education Committee
Seventh Day Adventist Welfare Service
Trinidad and Tobago Association
West Indian Teacher
Association of Jamaicans (U.K.) Trust
West Indian Citizens Association
People's National Congress (Haringey)
Standing Conference of African Organisations in U.K.
St. Lucian Association
Barbados Overseas Nationals & Friends
West Indian League
Council for Indians Abroad
Black Peoples' Conference
Grenada & Caribbean Welfare Association
Montserrat Overseas Peoples' Progressive Alliance
West Indian Friendship Association
Ghana National Association
Caribbean Peoples' Association
Leicester Credit Union

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RESPONSE AND ACTION.

1. RESPONSE.

Leafleting/Personal Contact	12	
Displays/Galas	7	
Media	15	(Black London, Nationwide, West Indian World, Equals)
Others (Friends, Social Services Departments etc.)	7	
General	11	
Total	52	

11 Phone Contacts only
41 Acted Upon

2. ACTION.

A. Withdrew after some contact, one or more visits - 15

Reasons

Took relatives' child	1
Husband not in agreement	2
Moved	1
Changed Mind	2
Friend's application refused	1
Family Death	1
Inadequate finances	1
No reasons given	6

B. Agency decided it could not proceed - 9

Reasons

Age/Health	4
Known to Local Authority Social Services Department - Child Abuse	1
Accommodation Problems	2
No suitable child	1
Single, unsupported, inadequate applicant	1

C. Applications Processed and Completed - 5

2 placements - 9 year old girl
Mixed race twins aged 2 months
1 placement under consideration - 16 month old African child
1 conceived own child
1 Father returned to Nigeria when a child was available and offered and has not returned.

D. Applications Still in Process - 11

During the period of the project I.A.S. placed 8 other children with ethnically similar families, three of whom were Asian children.

Other Resources from the Project - 1 social aunt
1 residential worker

* *

Need your lovin'

Open your home, and your heart, to Winston...

Or Jimmy; or Sandra; or Nancy; or Louis; or Clarence. These are just the tip of the iceberg, for there are so many West Indian kids who need help right now. You've probably heard about this from neighbours, read of it in newspapers and seen programmes about it on TV.

They've had to leave home.

The reasons can be as varied as the day is long: the high rate of unemployment; the fact that, when in employment, you often had to work a 90 hour week to make a living wage; the terrible housing situation; couples who are divorced or separated; unmarried mothers; illness or death in the family . . . . these and many more.

The council does the best it can for children in it's care, providing food and clothing, shelter and schooling, but that can never be the same as having a loving Mum and Dad.

And a real family life.

So these kids, toddlers and teenagers alike, are growing up in a kind of limbo unless . . . ., unless people who love children and feel they could make room for one more; or people who always wanted children but didn't get one . . . . step in with an offer from the heart to open up their home.

You can foster or you can adopt.

Foster Parents are paid a generous allowance to help them to give a child a temporary home, while he or she cannot be with his own parents. It's a kind of arrangement between the council and the foster parents. Almost invariably, the idea is for the child to return to his parents sooner or later.

Adoption is altogether different, that's taking a child into your family permanently, giving him your name and becoming its rightful parents, so it has to go through court. When it has though, the parents are as responsible for their new child as if he had been born to them, and he is theirs for always.

There's not a lot of annoying red-tape.

With something as important as fostering or adoption, there have to be some questions. So all of us have to be sure that it is the right plan for the particular circumstances of the child in need. For instance, sometimes brothers and sisters are involved and it's only natural that they should be kept together. Other times the child needs to be part of a big happy family; or sometimes in a childless (or single parent) family where he will get all the attention.

Just as kids are different, then the circumstances and questions may be different too.

You can be absolutely sure though, that social workers will only ask the questions they absolutely have to with the child's best interests in mind.

Where do the natural parents fit in.

If you adopt a child you will do so with the parents' consent and, in almost every case, the child will have no more contact with his family. You will become his real parents.

If you foster, the child will nearly always keep a link with his own family. It's good for him or her to see and know mothers, fathers, grandmothers and other relatives. That way, when he does go home, it will be to loved ones and not to strangers.

You don't need a mansion or a big car.

Whether you live in a little home or a big one the important thing is that you can love and understand children, and can offer a comfortable family atmosphere. You can be single too, as long as there is a sensible plan for the child's care. Basically, if you're between around 25 and 50 have good health and a big heart . . . . then you're the kind of people or person that one of these kids really needs.

"Will you be my Mum and Dad?"

To: IAS, 160 Peckham Rye, London, SE22 or 'phone us on 01-693 9611
Yes, I care. I would like to look after a child in need.
Please get in touch with me, and tell me more.

Name _____

Address _____

_____

_____

Tel. No. _____

COMMISSION FOR RACIAL EQUALITY BURSARY TOUR OF THE WEST INDIES

(Trinidad, Dominica and Jamaica)

Bursary: Mary James - Independent Adoption Society.

Lists of Agencies, Visits and Activities.

Trinidad - October 16th - November 2nd 1978.

Agency	
SERVOL Elaine Robertson.	Visits to rural community development projects focussing on needs of children under 5 years. Gran Couver, Caroni.
Probation Service Phyllis Robinson.	Attended Juvenile Court (met Magistrate), visit to probation office in Port of Spain. Visit to clients in Valencia, Sangre Grande.
Magistrates Conference (Winifred Rose, former Chief P.O.)	Attended opening of conference and morning sessions. Evening cocktail party, met magistrates, Chief Magistrate, Attorney General, wife of the President.
Adoption Board, Lorna Rigsby & other staff.	Attended Board Meeting in Port of Spain. Visited foster and adoptive homes in Le Brea, Caroni, San Fernando, Valencia.
Social Welfare Department, Mrs. Charles and staff.	Visited various offices and accompanied staff to "The Pay" to social welfare clients, St. James Hospital for Elderly and Chronic Sick, Private Nursery School (Diego Martin), Old Peoples' Home (Sangre Grande), Housing Development (Diego Martin).
Family Planning Association	Discussion with Director, Port of Spain.
St. Mary's Children's Home, Mrs. Tracey and staff.	Visit.
St. Dominic's Children's Home Sister Margaret Mary & staff.	Whole day visit including school.
Association of Voluntary Child Care Agencies.	Addressed an evening meeting.
T.T.V.	Community Dateline interview - 15 minute live transmission.
British High Commission	Visited Commission.
Sight Seeing and Social Events	Tobago, Bird Sanctuary, Pitch Lake, local amateur Gilbert and Sullivan performance, the Prime Minister's Best Village Competition, visit to Museum and met visiting Director of San Cave.

Dominica - November 6th - November 12th 1978.

Department of Adult Education Dora Joseph.	Visited office and met staff. Accompanied staff into country districts to visit schools, voluntary workers and church workers.
Social Welfare Department, Mrs. Blanc and John Baptiste	Visit to social welfare office, visits to to four foster families in Roseau.
CADEC Self Help Projects	Discussion with Co-Ordinator of combined projects.
Social League, Rita Revere and staff.	Visited Day Centre and met one of the league's workers in the country.

Government Officials	Met for discussions the Minister of Home Affairs, Legal Adviser to the Minister and former magistrate, Mrs. James and the Under Secretary Mrs. Barsey.
Sight seeing and other social activities.	People's Action Theatre, Festival of Remembrance, Saturday market in Roseau, sight seeing tour of part of the island and botanic gardens.

Jamaica November 14th - December 8th 1978

Kingston

National Children's Homes Maisie Best and other staff	Met staff and children. Lectured to students on N.C.H. Residential Child Care Course.
University Department of Preventative and Social Medicine. Met Head of Department and voluntary worker, Mrs. Archer	Visit to the yards and a back yard nursery.
Family Court Mrs. Morrison	Met probation officers, two Judges, police trainees. Sat in on two courts dealing with custody, maintenance and children's cases.
Jamaican Broadcasting Corporation	Did 15 minute live broadcast.
British High Commission Tony Stevens	
Women's Bureau Mrs. McNeil	Visited Women's Centre, day care unit for pregnant school girls and school girl mothers.
University of West Indies Social Work Department, John Maxwell	Discussion.
Jamaica Association of social workers	Attended a business meeting and panel discussion on mental illness and treatment.
State School for Deaf Children	Visited.
Adoption Board Mrs. Holmes	Discussion and visit to office.
Manchester/Mandeville Area Children's Department Mr. Bernard and John Small	Visited office for discussion. Visit to four foster homes, met children and foster parents.
Voluntary Child Care Provisions	Hanbury Salvation Children's Home, Catholic Boys Training School.
Education Mr. Leslie	Cobla Youth Project. Christiana Secondary School, met staff and children, saw Family Education Class, (girls only).
Housing Department	Shown around two low cost housing developments and invited into the homes of some residents.
Sight seeing	Spanish Town, Port Antonio, Port Royal, Frome Sugar Estate, Coastal Areas, Blue Mountains, two Great Houses and National Gallery.

My aim in visiting the West Indies was to obtain some firsthand experience and understanding of present day family life, social conditions and child care provisions in the various islands. Although my visits were comparatively short they were fairly action packed thanks to the help of the West Indian colleagues and friends both in the U.K. and the countries visited.

Trinidad

I found there to be considerable interest in the provision of services for children and families in Trinidad, but the professional workers I met were concerned that there was no integrated service and consequently services were fragmented and lacked any co-ordinated policy.

Children tend to enter public care via Juvenile Courts having committed some offence which usually indicates family breakdown or even complete disintegration. The Juvenile Court, with the help of the Probation Department, carefully considers the child's background, but often the only option open to the Court is committal to one of the large Children's Homes. I attended Juvenile Court and among the cases I heard was that of Johnny, aged 9½ years. He had been found causing damage in the town. His mother could not be found, he did not know his father, he had been living with someone to whom he was not related and who was no longer prepared to be responsible for his care. He seemed to be fairly typical of the children I saw brought before the Court that morning, a product of a common law union where the parents had separated, whose subsequent care had been with friends, relatives or acquaintances until such arrangements proved unsatisfactory and they became consequently rootless and alone. In any society the children who appear before the Court are unlikely to be typical of the child population as a whole, but I obtained the impression that there was concern about children like Johnny and some anxiety that the traditional ways in which families had coped and provided support in the past were proving less effective. In Trinidad and the other islands, perhaps particularly Dominica, one saw the other side of migration; children left behind while parents had gone to England or Canada or America to find work and improve their situation. Often the arrangements back home were satisfactory but sometimes they were not. Social workers in all the islands were concerned about the care of such children as they grew into young adults when their grandparents or guardians became less able to care and less willing to cope with the increasing responsibilities.

I do not have the numbers of children in care in Trinidad, but I visited two Children's Homes with a total of approximately 1,000 children in permanent residence. Some of these children have family contacts, many do not. Everyone I met was very eager and interested in developing a fostering service and more adoption. There was concern about the number of children being brought up in large institutions. I was rather surprised to discover in Trinidad that whereas there is some short-term foster care for abandoned babies who are to be adopted, there is no official provision available for the long-term fostering of children in care, although a tradition of fostering as a private arrangement between individuals, both friends and family that is well established.

Residential staff, who seemed eager for children in their care to be found substitute families, told me that would-be adopters often came directly to them offering a home, but referral to the Adoption Board seemed to be ineffective or at the best very protracted. The adoption workers for their part are kept busy processing applications from families wanting to legalise existing arrangements. This whole process seemed a rather cumbersome one. Firstly the workers have to prepare a report for the Adoption Board's approval, following which begins a six months supervised probationary period before finally an application can go to Court. Since most of the children and families involved in these procedures have probably lived together for many years, I thought that a simplified and shorter process would be more appropriate. A few children are placed for adoption directly by the Adoption Board but these are usually healthy babies who have been abandoned. As in the U.K. there are more childless couples wanting to adopt than there are babies available. When I described the kind of children who were now being considered as suitable for adoption in the U.K. I had a number of reactions; professional social workers were apprehensively in favour, other people such as magistrates were openly incredulous at the idea that anyone would wish to take on an unknown or problem child.

Because of the necessity to limit the length of this report I am not able to describe or comment upon all the agencies and institutions I visited. My programme, however, did cover a wide range of life in the country and served to illustrate how problems were being tackled in various ways by individuals and agencies. SERVOL's community development programme is attempting to improve the lives of families and children by mobilising people in their own communities. I met members of village committees who were involved in building community centres to be used for all kinds of village activities, including pre-school nurseries which in turn were staffed by young people of the community. Some village committees were involved in campaigning to improve roads and bus services, another committee had been organised to help a family rebuild their home, destroyed by some kind of natural disaster. The Family Planning Association is also very much involved in family education and a recent Family Planning Week had served to illustrate the extent of their task. Trinidad like the other West Indian Islands has a high birth rate with many children not born to parents of stable co-habitations or legal marriages. There also an increasing number of school girl mothers. Despite these facts society at large subscribes to a strict moral code and middle class Trinidadians can adopt attitudes of extreme censure. The Director of the Family Planning Association told me how she felt the F.P.A. often operates in a climate of "moral hypocrisy", and is frequently accused of encouraging promiscuity. They view their task in its widest sense, to encourage an open discussion of family moral and sexual matters, help change attitudes of both men and women as well as providing help with contraception. It seemed to me that the F.P.A. is in the middle of a slow but nevertheless real process of re-evaluation and change of family patterns and the roles of men and women which is taking place throughout the West Indies.

With the hospitality of colleagues and friends it is easy to quickly feel at home in bustling Port of Spain, but the realities of Trinidad as a Third World country even if a comparatively rich one are more apparent when travelling in the country districts. Visiting ordinary families in rural Trinidad provided a learning experience which I think will be helpful back in Britain. It appeared to me that families and social workers alike were more accepting of the personal and material hardships of everyday life. There was not an expectancy on the part of the helpers or the helped that solutions could be immediate or always available, it was more a question of coping with life as it is. I certainly felt that my assessment of "problems" and suggestions for "help" would probably have been unacceptable and inappropriate reflecting my own life cultural experiences rather than life as seen by the families themselves.

My overwhelming impression of Trinidad was one of bustle and friendliness. I found the people I met informally and officially hospitable and helpful. They all provided an interesting view of Trinidadian life and were generous and open in telling me about their own families, their work and views of present day society, as well as being interested in me, my work and life in the U.K. I was surprised to find Trinidad such a busy country, the number of cars combined with the heat made the traffic congestion seem worse than in London. In the country I was impressed by the rich variety of the trees, vegetation and the beauty of the flowers and fruits. The availability of oil dollars seems to mean that many projects are under way, but little is finished. Consequently road building and water schemes add to the confusion as does the rather idiosyncratic Trinidadian telephone system. Route taxis, another typically Trinidadian invention, while not being the most efficient method of transport, are cheap and provide a marvellous means of meeting all kinds of people. I was very impressed by the multi-racial nature of Trinidadian society and while I did sense some rivalry between the races and classes I was certainly not aware that any prejudices were related strictly to colour - I enjoyed being mistaken for the sister of a black social worker!

Dominica

The drive from the airport across the island to Roseau provides a good idea of the island, its scenery, natural resources and way of life. The island is small, 29 miles long and 15 miles wide, and because of its mountainous terrain not all the land can be developed for habitation or agriculture. The fact that the island is not developed in an urban or technical sense makes the scenery beautiful for a visitor but means that life can be very hard for its people. Most people work on the land, the country is predominantly Catholic, families are very large and there is a population of approximately 75,000, half of whom are under 15 years of age. Passing through small villages with wooden houses one sees many children neatly dressed in uniform, going to and from school, women washing their clothes in the river, men carrying their cutlasses walking or travelling in lorries to work on the various estates and people crowded on to country buses taking their produce to market. Another feature of village life and country roads is the many small animals, goats, pigs and dogs wandering at large.

I arrived in Dominica just a few days after Independence, evidence of which could be seen in the flags still flying and notices and slogans displayed in various places (one which should have read "Let's Produce Together" had been changed to "Let's Reproduce Together" by a local joker). The post-Independence mood was not as euphoric as I had expected, many people seemed apprehensive about the realities of independence for such a small island and less than confident in the capacity and integrity of their leaders. Dominica is very dependent upon outside help, assistance comes from a number of governments other than the British; Canada especially is involved in school building and child care developments. The local newspaper and radio reported independence gifts of funds and equipment from friendly governments and commercial concerns as well as negotiations for future assistance.

I was able to get quite a good idea of family life at various levels of society from my visits to people in their homes and was also able to see some of the public and voluntary welfare and education services. I visited a number of schools where (as in Jamaica and Trinidad) the size of the child population was very evident. One school in a small village had over 800 children on its register. Some of the schools had fairly modern buildings with individual class rooms, very few had classes of under 40 children. Often much to the regret of teaching staff equipment was either lacking or at the best very basic. Some older schools are grossly overcrowded; one infant school I visited had two rooms with six classes in each room. Despite which this particular school had a very relaxed and caring atmosphere. As in other Caribbean countries a shift system operated in the schools and families have to provide books, writing materials and uniforms, all of which put considerable demands upon many who can ill afford such expenditure. Since much emphasis is put upon school achievement as a way to better life, great effort and sacrifice is made by many parents to provide children with the opportunity of a good education.

I visited a fairly wide variety of schools on all three of the islands included in my tour. Everywhere the number of pupils reflected a large child population. The formal atmosphere in the schools and the firm direct teaching methods employed suggested British schools during the early years of the century. West Indians view the modern British approach to education as lacking in discipline and failing to ensure basic literacy and numeracy, while to someone from the U.K. the West Indian approach can seem rather repressive, lacking in opportunity to develop original expression, self reliance and imagination. Education in the Caribbean is competitive with progress for children from poor families depending upon examination success. Many more affluent families pay for their children to be educated privately.

Voluntary agencies are much in evidence in Dominica, CADAC, a combined Caribbean Church organisation, is involved in a number of community projects which mainly seek to provide employment and production throughout the island. Support is given to such schemes as fishing, agricultural co-operatives and craft work. The Social League is also involved in community development, family education and child care. Their workers told me of their concern about effects of unstable family units upon its individual members and society at large and the increasing problem of teenage pregnancy. I visited a day centre and creche run by the Social League which takes approximately 90 children aged between 3 and 5 years. As well as providing a much needed resource the day

centre serves as a demonstration model of good child care practices and a focal point for the family education programme. Discussions for parents - mothers and fathers - take place at the centre and training and practical help is provided in the home by the League's community based workers throughout the island.

Official social services are provided by the Department of Social Welfare which at the time of my visit was part of the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Department is responsible for probation, child care services and social security. Dominica does not have any Children's Homes as such; children in care are placed into foster homes. In some instances the Department takes over responsibility for funding and supervision of existing private fostering arrangements between friends or family members but its staff also recruit families and make direct placements of children. Foster parents are paid approximately £10 per month per child which foster parents and workers alike felt was not sufficient. There seemed a good relationship between social workers and foster parents, particularly those who had been directly recruited by the agency. Social workers have difficulty however in providing the support services they would wish, not only because of staff shortages but also because of the difficulties of travelling to the more isolated areas of the island. I was able to visit four foster families which probably represented a good cross section of the kind of foster care provided on the island. In one instance three siblings were placed together and had been with their permanent family for seven years. The children were doing very well at school, their father who was mentally ill saw them from time to time, and in every way this seemed a good arrangement for the children. The foster homes I visited also probably represented a fairly typical range of home conditions to be found amongst ordinary families living in Roseau. One family lived in quite a good sized wooden town house, the home was well furnished in the local style but with signs of the family's success and interests evident in pictures and ornaments, the teenage children had record players with records not dissimilar to those popular with teenagers in the U.K. Another foster home was in a very small typical wooden house, very clean, a large refridgerator looked rather out of place but was a real necessity for hygenic food storage, even if a major expense. Other foster homes were much poorer, clean and neat, with few extras or luxury items and very limited space for living and sleeping. A common feature in Dominican homes were religious pictures, often the Virgin Mary, frequently hanging alongside a picture of the Queen. All of the foster mothers talked about general financial problems, the cost of food, shoes, school books; they all needed to do some work; the two most capable foster mothers went out to work, another took in laundry; a foster mother too old for proper work sold oranges. The mothers of all these foster children were dead. In all the cases there was only limited contact with their own families and this often appeared to be a cause of some friction.

Jamaica

I think it is fair to suggest that many people in the United Kingdom think of the West Indies as one place and one country, whereas each island has always guarded its own individuality and now in turn equally protects its political independence. The Caribbean islands are scattered over wide areas, Jamaica being approximately 1,000 miles from Trinidad and at the time of my visit the two islands seemed even farther apart with Jamaica, probably because of its current predicament, seeming to me very far removed from the islands of the Eastern Caribbean.

1978 has not been an easy year for Jamaica. Financial circumstances including the IMF Loan, the devaluation of the Jamaican dollar at 1% a month and the country's inability to buy goods from the outside world have all put additional strains upon an already difficult internal political and social situation. I had heard about the shortages, violence and unrest from Jamaican friends in the U.K. as well as during my West Indian travels. The fact that the friends with whom I stayed in Kingston had been held up at gun point very shortly before my arrival made these happenings a personal reality. The anxiety and apprehension of the citizens of Kingston was much in evidence in barred windows and doors, high fences and guard dogs, as well as the continual advice and warnings I received about travelling alone, being out after dark and talking to strangers. More or less everyone I met from all walks of life and for whatever reason sooner or later talked of the current difficulties and uncertainty about the future.

Nevertheless I was able to travel throughout the island and meet many people. My very first day in Jamaica gave me a glimpse of life for the poor. Sonia Archer, a voluntary worker attached to the University, took me to visit a back-yard nursery situated in a very poor but not untypical district on the outskirts of town. As we walked along the unpaved lanes lined with small wooden houses I obtained a vivid impression of life in such communities. Attached to one house was an open lean-to which housed a nursery for 14 local children, aged from 14 months to nearly 5 years. Furniture consisted of home made benches and tables, the room was decorated with pictures, mobiles and charts, again home made with imagination and flair. Both my companion and the nursery teacher were volunteers. They were middle aged women, not I suspect, formally educated, but both possessed of a natural way with children. The children like others who seldom see a white person at close quarters were shy at first but curious and interested, touching my skin, hair and clothes. This nursery and others like it provide an effective and inexpensive resource which is much needed by children and families in very disadvantaged communities. Sonia told me how life is increasingly difficult for more and more people especially the poor; there is little work, the cost of necessities such as food and clothing is high and rising. Sonia herself has two children aged 9 and 6 years whose father is in the U.S. She does not get paid by the university because of its lack of funds. Her children need a dollar a day each for bus fares and lunch and in reply to my enquiry she estimated her needs at at least 20 dollars (approximately £7) per week for living expenses. After visiting the supermarkets and shops I realised just how difficult it would be to keep a family on such a small sum. This description of Jamaican life for many of its citizens was repeated throughout my visit. A large secondary school in Christiana with 1,000 children registered for each shift had only approximately 700 in attendance because, in the view of the headmaster, parents could not afford shoes, uniforms and books. Consequently the children did not come to school.

Jamaican Social Services are quite sophisticated, the Children's Department administering family and child care provisions including a foster care programme. There are now two family courts, one in Kingston and one in Montego Bay, which deal with all legal matters relating to children and families. The newly renamed Protectional Department incorporates the probation and the prison service. The Social Development Commission is responsible for Community and Youth Work. Social Security provisions on the other hand are limited. There are some old age benefits and provisions for poor relief but no unemployment benefit.

The Family Court in Kingston is very busy but well organised. I was able to meet a Mrs. Morrison, the co-ordinator, as well as the two Judges who were sitting on the day of my visit. The cases I heard considered included juvenile offenders, maintenance issues and a paternity declaration amongst others. The Court is served by social workers from the Probation and the Children's Departments who operate an initial intake system and provide information for the Judges as well as follow up services. I was most impressed by both Judges who showed a sensitive, astute and sometimes humorous approach to the people before them. I was interested to hear about the change of law concerning the status of children. This change recognises the Jamaican family structure and abolishes the concept of illegitimacy as it formerly existed in line with British law. The new law gives equal rights in relation to inheritance for all children where paternity has been established, irrespective of whether or not they were born within the legal state of marriage. Since 70% of all children in Jamaica are in British terms illegitimate this is far reaching legislation which affects many people.

The different structure of the Caribbean family is an important factor to be taken into account when considering the society and life in the various West Indian islands. The historical reasons for existing family patterns seem to be widely recognised and accepted, but migration, the movement of population from the country districts into the towns together with the different aspirations and expectations of mid-twentieth century life, and the general financial climate in the developed countries all seem to be putting a considerable strain on the extended family and community support structures and undermining some of their former vital strengths. The Women's Bureau is a voluntary organisation very much concerned with the Jamaican family and an organisation which seems to take a realistic view of the problems of women,

especially those faced with the task of bringing up large families dependent only upon their own financial and emotional resources. The Bureau runs schemes which aim to give more economic independence to women including all kinds of productive co-operatives, the most recent one being the manufacture of bumfies from cassava flour. I was able to visit the Women's Centre which is a new project based in Kingston and which attempts to grapple with the problem of schoolgirl mothers. In 1977 22.4% of all children born in Jamaica were to mothers under 19 years of age. In one hospital 1 in 5 out of a total of 912 deliveries were by girls 16 years and under. Motherhood usually means that a mother's education is terminated and that consequently the girl joins the ranks of unskilled and unemployable young women. (Statistics show that ½ of all Jamaican households are headed by women, the majority of whom are unemployed). The Women's Centre takes 40 to 50 pregnant girls and mothers with their babies for one to two terms. The emphasis is on family life, education, sex education and helping the girls understand their situation and the full context of West Indian family patterns. As well as providing education on a daily basis for the girls within the centre, discussion groups for the parents of the young mothers and for the fathers of the babies also take place. Following their stay at the Centre girls return to complete their education in various schools and training institutions and day care is arranged for the babies.

I was obviously interested in the work of the Children's Department and fortunate to be able to spend some time with a former Soul Kids' colleague now working in the Mandeville office. I particularly wanted to see something of the department's fostering programme and was interested to hear from my friend that he had found foster homes for 60 children during the last two years. This was without any advertising or specific recruitment. He told me that a high percentage of the foster parents were childless and had previously lived in the U.K. We discussed some possible implications of this and agreed that it could be of considerable interest to find out more about these families, their composition, the age and health of foster parents, if they had learned about fostering in the U.K. and whether the British approach to fostering had in any way affected their preparedness to foster in Jamaica. I visited four of the foster homes; in some homes met foster mothers and children, in others the whole foster family. On the whole the foster parents I met were perhaps slightly older in terms of the age of the children placed with them than would have been the case in the U.K. All the children seemed to be needing permanent families; in the U.K. they would probably have been placed with a view to adoption. The children were mostly in the younger age group, all but one were girls.

In Jamaica adoption and fostering are administered in two separate departments and the Adoption Board operates under some considerable difficulty. The Board has been in existence for 21 years and it is staffed by the Director and two assistants to cover the whole island from a Kingston base. They process roughly 750 third party adoption applications each year which obviously leaves little time for much other work. I understood from the Director that in the past year staff had worked with 80 mothers who were considering adoption and had placed 28 babies. Consideration is being given to the incorporation of adoption into the Children's Department which already operates from district offices, but there seems some doubt as to if and when this will happen for financial and political reasons.

Some General Impressions.

Having visited the Caribbean I think I am now more aware of a number of things which affect the lives of West Indians living in the U.K. The initial culture shock experienced by new arrivals is something that I was able to share to some degree although I had an opportunity to prepare for my visit, was financially secure and arrived to a warm personal welcome. For newcomers to the U.K. a sense of disorientation together with harsh climatic conditions often takes an emotional and physical toll. The size of British society must create some loss of personal identity. The enclosed nature of British family life together with the impersonal atmosphere of large cities and towns is in harsh contrast with life back home and may create a new sensation of loneliness and isolation.

For some this may also be linked with a loss of important social status. Attitudes, family patterns, child rearing methods, the education system and the welfare services are all either new or different, needing time to be comprehended and assimilated. Sometimes the new ways may seem either ill-conceived or inappropriate, even undermining, to West Indian life styles and values.

The islands I visited each seemed to be at a political crossroad. Dominica just embarking upon independence was entering a new era. Trinidad approaching the end of its post-independence period under the leadership of Eric Williams is likely to be faced with a number of important decisions about its future leadership as well as wider economic and political issues. The urgency of Jamaica's financial and social problems made one feel that anything could be possible and people were talking quite seriously about revolution and civil war. In Jamaica one was aware of a nation struggling to establish its own identity and despite everything certain aspects of this struggle were positive, exciting and creative. On the otherhand the society as a whole is facing a major upheaval which is painful and distressing for most Jamaicans.

A visit to the Caribbean is a breathtaking experience. The beauty of the islands themselves, their mountains, sea shores, flowers, shrubs, trees, birds, butterflies, the climate and the people all combine to make an intense visual impact upon the visitor. The experiences of the past, Africa, slavery, European colonisation are still evident today in the mixture of races in Trinidad, the way of life in the rural villages of all the islands, in the attitudes and feelings of the people, the patterns of family life, in the cane fields which seem to engulf people by their height and density, in the creative arts and languages. Unlike Northern Europe, life in the Caribbean does not take place inside behind closed doors. Villages, towns and roads are usually alive with people going about their everyday business and demographic statistics, particularly the size of the child population, are visible to the eye. Small independent island countries have their own unique characteristics; news, politics and events are somehow more personal and immediate. Everyone knows everyone else in some way or another and personal secrets and indiscretions soon become public property. This aspect of life can be embarrassing to public figures, irksome to people who have experienced the kind of anonymity to be found in larger countries, but a continual source of conversation for many, There may be a lack of privacy but on the other hand one suspects that loneliness is not a common feature of West Indian life. Politics are important in the Caribbean and the subject of much discussion. Political leaders seem to be known in a personal way and are usually called by their first names. People have strong loyalties to individual parties and express their views loud and clear despite the possibility of repercussions which I am told could affect career advancement or even receipt of social security benefits.

I was interested in what seemed to me to be contradictions in Caribbean life. For example, while in many ways the islanders are very parochial they are not insular. Migration and the colonial past means that people are well informed, interested, and often personally in touch with life outside the Caribbean, particularly in the U.S., Canada and the United Kingdom. Another contradiction seems to relate to the rigid class structure which in many ways is more apparent in the West Indies than in the U.K., but despite this there seems to be a real informality about life and communication across class boundaries. To European eyes there seems to be a contradiction in the acceptance of a high moral code, the wide influence of the Churches and high level of involvement in Church activity with certain aspects of life such as the high illegitimacy rate. I suppose these "contradictions" illustrate how codes of behaviour, and standards which seem familiarly European are quite different when assimilated by people of other cultures and countries.

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Mary C. James,
January 1979.